



U.S. COURT OF FEDERAL CLAIMS BAR ASSOCIATION



Summer 2026 Newsletter

Dear Member,

We are pleased to share with you the Summer 2026 edition of the Court of Federal Claims Bar Association E-Newsletter.

This issue's theme is: *The Professional Value of Gathering*. While much of our work is necessarily adversarial – defined by deadlines, disputes, and advocacy – the strength of our profession is built on far more than litigation alone. It is also shaped by the opportunities we have to gather: to learn from one another, to share ideas, to build relationships, and to reflect on the shared responsibilities that accompany practice before the United States Court of Federal Claims.

With the Court of Federal Claims Judicial Conference approaching on September 24, 2026, this issue explores the many ways that collegiality, continuing education, and professional community strengthen both our advocacy and our Court. Informal professional interactions – whether through judicial conferences, committee work, educational programs, or other gatherings – often translate into stronger advocacy, more effective case management, and more productive professional relationships in the courtroom. Through the perspectives shared by our colleagues in this Newsletter, we are reminded that some of the most meaningful growth in our profession occurs outside of the courtroom, ultimately enhancing the work we do within it.

We are honored to feature contributions from Chief Judge Matthew H. Solomson, Bar Association President Robert Wagman, Judge Victor J. Wolski, Special Master Christian J. Moran, and Court staff member Valerie Stokes, each offering a unique perspective on the value of coming together as a professional community.

We hope you find this edition both informative and engaging, and we look forward to seeing many of you at the Judicial Conference on September 24, 2026.

If you have any questions or comments, or would like to submit an article for a future newsletter, please email newsletter@cfcbar.org.

Need to join or renew your membership in the bar association? [Click here](#).

Letter from the Chief Judge



Dear Colleagues,

This is our final newsletter before the Court's Judicial Conference in September, so let me offer a brief reflection on this quarter's theme – the professional value of gathering.

I'll begin with a verse from the biblical Book of Proverbs (27:19):

As face answers to face in water, so does one's heart to another's.

Water returns the face that leans over it. The image is simple and exact: the water gives back to us our own reflection. The verse tells us that human relationships work the same way. What we bring to another person – respect or contempt, patience or provocation – tends to be what that person reflects back to us. The heart answers the heart. To a remarkable degree, we are treated as we treat others.

That kind of reciprocity is hard to build in the arena of controversy. It is difficult to see opposing counsel clearly – as a person, a fellow citizen, a fellow officer of this Court – when we meet them only across the “v.” in a caption, in the heat of a contested matter. To know one another as we would wish to be known, we have to meet somewhere other than the field of battle.

That is what gatherings are for. A conference, a continuing-education session, a bar dinner – these are the non-adversarial spaces where the bench and bar come to recognize one another as colleagues rather than combatants. Trust is built there. And trust, once built, does not evaporate the moment a case is filed; it travels back into the courtroom with us.

I would not confine this to the bar. We owe the same discipline to our fellow citizens generally. Beyond our professional associations, we should seek out occasions to engage the broader public – and especially those on the other side of the questions that divide us. Some of those questions will be hard-fought, in this court and others, and at the ballot box.

Understanding is not agreement. We may come to see an opponent's position clearly, judge it wrong – even dangerous – and resist it with all our strength. Nor is any of this a call to false equivalence; sometimes a position really does threaten something we are right to defend, and one side of an argument stands nearer the truth than the other. Collegiality does not ask us to pretend otherwise. It asks only that we take the trouble to understand where others are coming from – to see the face before we answer it – and to remember that even a dangerous view is usually held by a person. Lincoln understood this. In the middle of a war he meant to win, he called for “firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the

right,” joined to “malice toward none.” That is the correct posture: conviction, along with all the civility we can muster. Understanding of that kind does not weaken the fight. It ennobles it.

I say this plainly because it matters. I have, on occasion, seen conduct that has no place in a courtroom – advocacy that mistakes vigor for hostility and forgets that the person on the other side is not an enemy. We may, and often should, oppose one another with everything the law allows. But we do so as officers of the same Court, bound by the same oath, and as citizens of the same Republic, working toward one end: the just resolution of our disputes under law.

So join us in September. Come not only to learn, but to gather – to see one another, and to be seen, as the professionals and fellow citizens we are.

With warm regards,

Chief Judge Matthew H. Solomson
Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims

President's Message



Dear Fellow Members of the Court of Federal Claims Bar Association,

As we approach this year's Judicial Conference coming in September, I find myself reflecting on something that can be easy to overlook in the day-to-day demands of the practice of law: the irreplaceable value of gathering together as a professional community.

We live and work in an era of extraordinary connectivity. We brief cases, exchange correspondence, and advise clients without leaving our offices. Depositions now are often conducted across time zones through a screen. Oral arguments, once synonymous with climbing the courthouse steps, are now sometimes delivered from a home study. The efficiencies are real, and none of us would trade them away entirely.

And yet, something essential is lost when connection is always mediated by technology. The conversations that shape careers, the mentorships that deepen practice, the quiet consensus-building that moves our practices forward – none of these happen on a video call the way they happen in a courthouse corridor, at a dinner table, or in the moments before a panel discussion begins.

Why Gathering Matters for Our Bar Association

The Court of Federal Claims is a specialized tribunal and also a special community. The Court's docket – spanning government contracts, takings, tax refund, vaccine injury, and the full range of sovereign immunity claims – demands practitioners who not only know the law but know one another. In a court of this character, relationships between counsel and an understanding of the bench's temperament and priorities are not mere social advantages. They are professional assets.

Where you stand on the issues often depends on where you sit. Private practitioners, Justice Department attorneys and judges all approach the same issue from different perspectives. When we gather, we learn things that no reported opinion can teach us. We hear from judges about the kinds of submissions that advance their understanding of a case. We speak candidly with colleagues about their perspective of emerging trends and challenges that enables each of us to approach those issues with a greater understanding. Professional gatherings are also an opportunity to identify the young attorneys in our ranks who will one day lead this bar, and we begin the work of supporting them. That transmission of institutional knowledge – informal, conversational, and relational – is only possible when we are in the same room.

The Judicial Conference as a Professional Investment

The annual Judicial Conference of the Court of Federal Claims is the centerpiece of our Bar Association for good reason. It brings together practitioners, judges, and scholars in a setting designed for exactly this kind of exchange. The programming is substantive – panels, presentations, and discussions that carry CLE credit and address the questions our members are actually wrestling with. But the conversations that happen outside the formal sessions are equally important.

I encourage every member of the Bar Association to approach the Judicial Conference not as an obligation to be discharged but as an investment to be made. Come with questions you have been unable to answer from your office. Arrive with a willingness to introduce yourself to someone whose work you have read but whose hand you have not shaken.

For those earlier in their careers, I want to say this directly: your presence at the Judicial Conference is noticed. The relationships you build there will open doors that no cold email or LinkedIn connection can. My experience is that senior practitioners in this Bar are generous with their time and experience when given the opportunity to share them. The Judicial Conference is that opportunity.

For those of us further along, we know we never stop improving. As the practice of law evolves, we must evolve with it or risk being left behind. We all benefit when we share our time, the occasional war story, our candor about what we have learned, all of which furthers our active investment in the Bar.

A Community Worth Preserving

Years ago, a former judge described the Court of Federal Claims as the “best kept secret in the law business.” That sentiment resonates today. The Court of Federal Claims Bar is small enough that every member can be known, and specialized enough that our collective expertise is genuinely rare. Those qualities are worth protecting. They are protected not by passive membership but by active participation – by showing up, year after year, to reinvest in the professional community that makes this practice possible.

The Judicial Conference is the most visible expression of that participation. I look forward to seeing you there, to the conversations we have not yet had, and to the work we will do together in the months and years ahead.

Respectfully,

Bob Wagman

Ask the Judge!
Judge Victor J. Wolski

1. *In your view, what is the professional value of bringing together members of the bench and bar outside the context of active litigation? In a profession that is often adversarial by design, how important are non-adversarial spaces in fostering trust, collegiality, and mutual respect within the legal community?*

ANSWER: Although the best lawyers are ones who can imagine being in the shoes of their counterparts, the zealous representation of clients can lead to unnecessary and counterproductive frictions among litigators. Extracurricular meetings are an ideal way to remind lawyers that their opposing numbers are people, too. Also, lawyers in private practice have the opportunity to establish relationships with other lawyers in the same practice area, who might one day be counsel for co-parties or in related cases. These types of contacts promote greater cooperation and civility in litigation, freeing up energy and mental resources for the tasks that really matter.

2. *From the Court's perspective, how does a strong, engaged, and collaborative Bar contribute to the effective administration of justice? In what ways does the relationship between the bench and bar shape the quality and efficiency of proceedings before the Court?*

ANSWER: A strong, engaged and collaborative Bar is essential for the effective administration of justice. Counsel in our cases are in the best position to recognize shortcomings or unintended consequences of our rules and practices, and should be comfortable to suggest improvements to the Court. Discussions among members of the Bar at events like our Judicial Conference can help to develop, percolate, and cross-pollinate ideas to improve our Court's practices, improving the quality and efficiency of our proceedings.

3. *Have you observed ways in which informal professional interactions, whether through judicial conferences, committee work, educational programs, or other gatherings, translate into stronger advocacy, improved case management, or more productive professional relationships in the courtroom?*

ANSWER: Yes, to all three. Lawyers who become acquainted through such gatherings as judicial conferences and committees, and inns of court, tend to treat each other more civilly and respectfully in the throes of litigation. This results in fewer snags during the discovery and scheduling processes, less bombastic and vitriolic language in briefs (please check your adverbs at the door), and smoother hearings and arguments. These non-case-related interactions are, of course, great ways for lawyers to continue to learn and improve their craft. Lawyers who seek out and make the most of these opportunities tend to be better prepared and make better advocates, in my experience.

4. *As we look ahead to the upcoming USCFC Judicial Conference, what do you hope members of the Bar take away from the experience, not only in*

terms of substantive learning, but also in their development as professionals and members of a broader legal community?

ANSWER: It is my hope that attendees of our Judicial Conference will be able to share insights with litigators in both their own and other practice areas, to improve the methods and manner in which information and argument are presented to the Court. Members of the Bar should also be alert to doctrinal developments from outside their practice areas that may be useful in their litigation practice. As always, more seasoned practitioners and relative newcomers should take advantage of opportunities to engage with each other, so that wisdom and fresh perspectives may be profitably exchanged. And hearing presentations from some of the best litigators, as well as noteworthy scholars, should prove thought-provoking and inspiring to members of the Bar.

5. *Reflecting on your own career, how have professional gatherings and opportunities for continuing education shaped your understanding of the practice of law and the role of the judiciary? Are there lessons from those experiences that continue to inform your work today?*

ANSWER: For two decades, I have been a member of the J. Edgar Murdock Inn of Court, which meets at the U.S. Tax Court. The inn is made of up tax practitioners, who are mostly but not exclusively based in the D.C.-area.

Members have litigated on both sides of tax controversies in our court, the Tax Court, district courts, and various Circuits. Every year at these meetings, I learn about procedures and practices of other federal courts, as well as administrative proceedings, and gain a greater understanding of the way tax returns are processed, audits are conducted, and litigation is prepared. I have made some good friends in the process, and have discovered both talented tax lawyers and ideas to improve the rules and practices of our court---which have benefited the Court in my role as chairman of the Tax Committee of our Advisory Council.

****Quick Answer Round****

1. Grammar: Oxford comma or no Oxford comma?

ANSWER: Oxford comma. I like to liberally use commas--and em dashes, too.

2. Scheduling: digital calendar or manual calendar?

ANSWER: Mostly manual, but I am trying to join the 21st Century.

3. While working: background noise (music/podcast) or silence?

ANSWER: Usually silence, occasionally classical music.

4. Lunch: bring or buy?

ANSWER: Bring.

5. Music: best concert you have attended?

ANSWER: I attended many great shows in the Seventies and Eighties, including Devo, Buzzcocks, the Ramones, the Jam, and Graham Parker and the Rumour.

Probably the best one was the first time I saw the Clash, in September 1979 at the Palladium in New York. They debuted songs from the soon-to-be-released

Ask the Special Master!
Special Master Christian J. Moran

1. *In your view, what is the professional value of bringing together members of the bench and bar outside the context of active litigation? In a profession that is often adversarial by design, how important are non-adversarial spaces in fostering trust, collegiality, and mutual respect within the legal community?*

ANSWER: Respect, collegiality, and trust are based upon knowing the other person. We can more easily learn about other people while sharing a cup of coffee. We might discover that someone with whom we have an adversarial relationship also happens to cheer for the same sports team as us or likes the same type of movie. Years ago, a special master and an attorney sang a song together! From that commonality, it is easier to see the other person as a person, not just an attorney who argues. I expect that if attorneys got to know my special master colleagues, the attorneys would conclude that at least some of the special masters are people. But, I'm not revealing which special masters are people. You will have to come to the Judicial Conference to find out.

2. *From the Court's perspective, how does a strong, engaged, and collaborative Bar contribute to the effective administration of justice? In what ways does the relationship between the bench and bar shape the quality and efficiency of proceedings before the Court?*

ANSWER: The Office of Special Masters is fortunate to include two people who litigated cases in the Vaccine Program. Special Master Roth and Special Master Shah educate all the special masters about some of the issues often encountered by attorneys representing petitioners and respondent, respectively.

On the other hand, the attorneys who represent the parties have not (to my knowledge) been judicial officers. Thus, the attorneys may be less familiar with the challenges that special masters face. When special masters share that they often dealing with a particular issue, the attorneys may be able to help address this issue.

3. *Have you observed ways in which informal professional interactions, whether through judicial conferences, committee work, educational programs, or other gatherings, translate into stronger advocacy, improved case management, or more productive professional relationships in the courtroom?*

ANSWER: Special Master Horner and Special Master Shah lead separate committees devoted to improved case management. These committees allow for a flow of information among the special masters, attorneys for petitioners, and attorneys for the government. To take a small example, special masters have communicated that the parties are too often citing internet material via a hyperlink. Using hyperlinks is actually precluded by the Vaccine Rules because hyperlinks can change. After special masters reminded attorneys to download relevant material from the internet, create a pdf, and file the material as an exhibit

labeled with an appropriate number or letter, the attorneys have more regularly followed this practice, representing their clients more effectively.

4. *As we look ahead to the upcoming USCFC Judicial Conference, what do you hope members of the Bar take away from the experience, not only in terms of substantive learning, but also in their development as professionals and members of a broader legal community?*

ANSWER: In the context of litigating a case, lawyers naturally think about how something will affect their client. But, this focus can be too narrow. In the broader context of a Judicial Conference, attorneys will have opportunities to learn with nothing on the line.

5. *Reflecting on your career in the law, what habits, principles, or practices have helped you sustain a commitment to excellence over many years? Are there particular approaches to professional development, intellectual curiosity, or reflection that you believe are especially important for lawyers seeking to maintain a high standard of practice throughout their careers?*

ANSWER: Being a judicial officer who hears only one type of case has advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that I think I have a pretty good idea of what is happening in the Office of Special Masters. One disadvantage is that I know much less about the practice of law outside of the Vaccine Program.

With this background, I think I have benefited from attending panels at the Judicial Conference that are not about the Vaccine Program. For example, at a recent conference, I learned about ways to access electronically stored information. With this awareness, I was then able to bring this topic to cases in the Vaccine Program.

****Quick Answer Round****

1. Coffee: What is your ideal coffee order?

ANSWER: I tend to drink black tea with honey so any coffee is a treat for me. I particularly like Starbucks pistachio lattes, which come out around February.

2. Air travel preference: Window or Aisle?

ANSWER: Aisle. I am on the taller side so I appreciate the chance to stretch my legs (without tripping anyone).

3. Commute to work: Public transit, private vehicle, or something else?

ANSWER: This summer, I am driving to work in my car but often give a ride to a friend / neighbor. However, I also enjoy biking to work. But, my building is currently renovating the gym / fitness center / locker rooms, which has taken away a chance to shower after arriving at the office.

4. Unread text messages: What is your current count?

ANSWER: One text message. But more than 400 unread emails.

5. Series recommendation: What TV or streaming series would you recommend?

ANSWER: I recently enjoyed "The Chestnut Man," which is on Netflix. The Chestnut Man is a super suspenseful thriller as police officers in Denmark investigate a killer. Usually, I don't binge shows but I watched each of the two seasons in about two days each because I needed to know what was going to happen next. Warning: the show does feature some brief scenes with dead bodies that could be upsetting to some viewers.

Ask the Staffer!

Valerie Stokes

1. Can you describe your role at the U.S. Court of Federal Claims and what a typical day looks like for you?

ANSWER: As an ECRO (Electronic Court Recording Operator) Case Administrator, my role is a blend of courtroom technology management and macro-level case logistics. A typical day begins in the courtroom, where I set up and test our electronic recording equipment to ensure absolute technological readiness for hearings and trials. From there, I transition to case intake, reviewing the filings submitted overnight through our electronic docket and managing the random assignment of new cases to our judges to ensure an equitable distribution.

Throughout the day, my primary focus is actively managing the dockets for three of our judges. I monitor deadlines, process entries, and try to keep the records seamless. I also have the pleasure of serving as a backup to a wonderful colleague, assisting with the review of attorney applications for admission to the court's bar to ensure strict compliance with our administrative standards.

2. What do you enjoy most about working at the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, and what has been most rewarding about your role?

ANSWER: I really enjoy my colleagues the most. Not only are they all very knowledgeable, but they really are also quick to lend a helping hand if anyone becomes burdened with work. I'd say we are a real team.

The most rewarding thing is hearing from former law clerks who are now practicing out in the field and handling cases at their respective firms. It is incredibly fulfilling to see their careers progress.

3. In your experience, how do professional gatherings like the Judicial Conference help strengthen the connection between the people who keep the Court running and the attorneys who practice before it?

ANSWER: In a modern court system dominated by electronic filing and remote proceedings, it is incredibly easy for the relationship between attorneys and court support staff to become strictly transactional. Professional gatherings like the Judicial Conference help to pull back the curtain on the computer screen. It's where we can exchange ideas and build mutual respect while working together.

4. As someone working behind the scenes in Court operations, what do you think practitioners may not always realize about the work that goes into keeping the Court running smoothly?

ANSWER: I think practitioners might not always realize the sheer volume of data and the meticulous attention to detail required to maintain the absolute integrity of the court's record. Every single document filed triggers a series of mandatory administrative quality-control checks, statistical tracking, and logistical coordination with chambers. We are managing tight statutory deadlines, safeguarding sensitive and sealed information and ensuring that chambers have a perfectly organized, legally compliant record ready for review.

5. What is one piece of advice you would give to attorneys or new practitioners about engaging with Court staff and navigating the administrative side of practice before the Court?

ANSWER: Take the time to analyze and familiarize yourself with the Court's local rules and ECF manuals. A lot of administrative friction can be avoided simply by using the resources the Court has already put together. If you are ever facing a complex filing scenario, an unusual procedural hurdle, or a technical glitch, please call the Clerk's Office and speak with your assigned case administrator before hitting that submit button. We're here to help. A two-minute conversation can save you hours of corrective work later.

****Quick Answer Round****

1. Grammar: Oxford comma or no Oxford comma?

ANSWER: Oxford comma.

2. Scheduling: digital calendar or manual calendar?

ANSWER: Digital Calendar.

3. While working: background noise (music/podcast) or silence?

ANSWER: Music.

4. Lunch: bring or buy?

ANSWER: Buy.

5. Music: best concert you have attended?

ANSWER: John Legend.

Judicial Conference

The 36th Annual U.S. Court of Federal Claims Judicial Conference will take place
at

The National Press Club on September 24, 2026

An Important Note on Registration:

If you registered for the 2025 conference, please note that you do not need to register for this year's conference.

If you are unsure if you are registered, please [reach out here](#) before proceeding with your registration.

Membership

[Need to join or renew your membership?](#) Click [here](#).

2026 Firm Membership

If you are interested learning more about a firm membership, click [here](#).

Thank you to our 2026 Firm Members!

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Important Announcements from the Court

Please visit the home page of the Court's [website](#) for important announcements.

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Ashley Russell

Executive Administrator to the
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